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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS TELLS POLCOUNS SHE LACKS
AUTHORITY TO ADDRESS ABUSES

Classified By: POLCOUNS MARGARET SCOBAY FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

11. (C) Summary. Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim told PolCouns March 3 that she was dissatisfied with the Ministry's lack of authority to address human rights abuses. Referring to a February 21 detention facility inspection, the Minister explained that her team had the ability to identify the abuses, but was unable to remove detainees from harm's way. She said her ministry needed support from the Prime Minister's office to expand its authority as well as more cooperation from MoI and MoD. She requested that embedded coalition training teams in detention facilities focus more on prevention of human rights violations. Shifting to the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP), Minister Wijdan noted that the BSP was moving ahead without making use of the Ministry's resources, and that it would be worthwhile to have a ministry liaison to the operations center to facilitate reports and referrals to the ministry. End Summary.

12. (C) In a meeting March 3, PolCouns complimented Human Rights Minister Wijdan Salim on the ministry's advocacy efforts. When asked whether the ministry had the access it needed, the Minister explained that while her ministry might have the access to monitor human rights abuses, it lacked the wherewithal to take action. She described a February 21 visit to the 2nd Division National Police detention facility, where she did not have to ability to remove detainees that she felt were in danger. The minister indicated that she was seeking expansion of her authorities through the PM's office to allow the ministry to transfer detainees out of unsafe situations -- though her initial overtures on this proposal had been rebuffed.

13. (C) PolCouns expressed the Embassy's support and offered assistance should the Minister so desire. Minister Wijdan responded by requesting that Coalition units embedded in police stations and detention facilities pay particular attention to potential mistreatment of detainees. She also noted that while she received verbal support from the Ministers of Defense and Interior, she saw little support in practical terms from these ministries. As an example, she said that information about detention facilities and their detainee populations were still being withheld from her ministry.

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14. (C) In other topics, the Minister told PolCouns that she was dissatisfied with the BSP's lack of inclusion of the relevant ministries. She noted for example that neither her ministry nor the Ministry of Displacement and Migration

had been invited to participate in planning sessions on detainee and displacement issues. She said that she had begun to show up to BSP meetings uninvited because of the overlap between BSP's work on detainees and the work of her ministry. Criticizing the potential duplication of efforts, she said that the ideal would be to have an MoHR employee as a liaison to the BSP operations center and the ministry. (Note: The ministry tries to maintain an active database of detainee names and locations, as well as reported human rights abuses. End Note).

COMMENT

15. (C) Minister Wijdan is generally considered by all fronts to be a non-partisan representative, being neither Sunni nor Shia. She argues that her ministry is one of the few that the citizens of Baghdad are able to access, the MoI, MOD or other government agencies either being too difficult or dangerous to reach. She has spent the last few weeks advocating with the Prime Minister and the security ministries for better conditions for detainees, and feels in some respects that she has reached the end of her rope on these issues. Minister Wijdan will be taking a three week international business tour to both the US and to Switzerland where she will have time to recharge and re-evaluate her strategy on how to address the issues of detention facility abuse as well as other issues.
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